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'At least they are welcome in my home!' Contentious hospitality in home accommodation of asylum seekers in Finland

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses hospitality towards asylum seekers as a political and contentious act. Accommodating asylum seekers in local homes is one of the pro-asylum mobilisations that emerged across Europe following the 'summer of migration'. Based on interviews with local hosts in Finland, this article demonstrates that offering accommodation is often motivated by an explicit mistrust in state asylum policies and a will to make a statement in support of the right to asylum. Home accommodation challenges the norm of housing asylum seekers in reception centres, isolated from the rest of society. Thus, it provides valuable social and spatial resources in the struggle for asylum. Departing from the understanding that questions of asylum and home are inherently political, and following feminist citizenship theorisation that connects the domestic with the political, this article and the concept contentious hospitality contribute to challenging the discursive division between public and private.

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Asylum; resistance; hospitality; home; political agency

Introduction

Over the past decade, mobilisations by migrants and their supporters have emerged as a response to restrictive border regimes in Europe and around the world (Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Fontanari and Ambrosini 2018; Tyler and Marciniak 2013). Since the summer of 2015, as a response to the increased migration to Europe and the related humanitarian and political crisis, there has been a proliferation of new mobilisations and protest movements in Europe claiming rights for people seeking asylum (Della Porta 2018; Rosenberger, Stern, and Merhaut 2018). In Finland, a grassroots movement for offering asylum seekers accommodation in private homes emerged to show solidarity and hospitality towards migrants. A voluntary-based network for organising accommodations was set up by local activists and volunteers together with asylum seekers in 2015. Since then, many local people have shared their homes with asylum seekers.

In this article, I examine the case of home accommodation from the perspective of contentious hospitality. Both state-level and civil society hospitalities and inhospitalities in the recent asylum 'crisis'[1] have received scholarly attention (e.g. Bendixsen and Wyller 2019; Oliver, Madura, and Ahmed 2019). The power relations between guest and host

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have typically been the focus of theorisation on hospitality (e.g. Bulley 2017; Derrida 2005), and the unequal yet unstable power relations are also present in home accommodation affecting the relationship formed between the local host and the asylum seeker (Merikoski 2019). Although power dynamics in the guest-host relation in home accommodation are important, in this article I focus on hospitality from a slightly different angle; as a form of political agency and resistance in the home space.

Various pro-asylum protests and solidarity mobilisations have recently been discussed in relation to spaces and spatiality (e.g. Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Çağlar 2016; Dadusc, Grazioli, and Martínez 2019; Maestri and Hughes 2017). What sets the empirical focus of this article apart from most other mobilisations and solidarity practices, such as volunteering, campaigning, or demonstrating, is that it takes place in the private home. Thus, the article relates to the literature that seeks to challenge the discursive divide between the private and public spheres of societal agency and citizenship (Lister 2007; Lonergan 2018). Although there is neither a clear audience nor clearly defined message in home accommodation – as protest movements typically have – accommodating asylum seekers is part of the solidarity practices emerging from recent pro-asylum activism and the social movement opposing restrictions to migration. The empirical contribution of this article is that it introduces the home as a space where rights for asylum seekers are being claimed and solidarities emerge. I suggest the term *contentious hospitality* to describe this type of hospitality that is both an act of solidarity and a form of resistance; an act against the politics that are increasingly restrictive of humanitarian migration and a disruption to the usual guest-host relations in asylum seekers' reception practices (cf. Brun and Fábos 2015).

As Tilly (2000) points out, acts of contentious politics[2] often make use of symbolically powerful public spaces and places. I follow feminist theorisation on home and citizenship in arguing that the meaning of home is not static, and something happening inside the home is by no means out of site or apolitical (Ahmed et al. 2003; Lister 2007). Rather, the home is one of the most symbolically important spaces in a society and nation, and thus, it is highly political and symbolically important. Home is a metaphor used actively in protectionist anti-immigration discourse, where the 'national home' is presumably threatened by outsiders (Walters 2004). In this article, I demonstrate that the hosts open their homes to make a statement and take part in the debates over who is welcome. In the next section, I outline the local context in which home accommodation has emerged. In what follows, I introduce the concept *contentious hospitality* by placing it in the theoretical discussions around contentious pro-asylum mobilisations and political space of home. In the latter part of the article, I discuss the empirical material with relation to the argument that hospitality in home accommodation is a contentious form of political agency.

Home accommodation of asylum seekers and the pro-asylum movement in Finland

For years, the tendency in Finland has been tightening the criteria for asylum to make Finland an undesirable country to seek asylum in (Kynsilehto and Puumala 2016). These changes reflect developments in European and Nordic asylum policies and changes in the Finnish party-political landscape (Wahlbeck 2019). Over the last decade, with growing support for right-wing populism, the political rhetoric of inferiorising 'underserving'

migrants has become more prominent (Keskinen 2016). In 2015, the populist Finns party strengthened their support and took part in government for the first time. In 2016, tougher measures to 'stop the uncontrollable flow of asylum seekers' were introduced by the new conservative coalition government (Saarikkomäki et al. 2018, 2). Residence based on humanitarian protection was no longer granted, and the safety assessment for Afghanistan and Iraq was updated, declaring them safe to return to, and subsidiary protection became scarce (Migri 2016). The changes included degradations in the legal assistance to asylum seekers, and in practice, stricter interpretations of applicants' situations made by immigration officers, leading to more negative decisions (Saarikkomäki et al. 2018). Some citizens, however, felt that borders were not securitised enough, and since the autumn 2015 there have been several demonstrations by nationalist anti-immigration groups, often accompanied with counter-demonstrations. As Prokkola (2018, 12) argues, anti-migration rhetoric did not simply emerge with increasing migration but it is linked to a longer history of nationalism, austerity politics, and political turbulence. Societal tensions resulting from these developments have rendered migration and asylum – always contested issues – further politicised.

The 'long summer of migration' and the political crisis that followed have revealed that, in many countries, people are in general more hospitable towards migrants than their governments, and various forms of solidarity have been taken up by locals around Europe (Fontanari and Ambrosini 2018; Gill 2018; Kasparek and Speer 2015). As elsewhere in Europe, civic mobilisations against restrictions to migration and asylum emerged in Finland. For example, Right to Live (see Näre 2018), a visible protest by asylum seekers supported by local activists, was ongoing for several months in the centre of the capital, drawing public attention to the issue.

In Finland, asylum seekers are accommodated in open reception centres, but they can also opt for private accommodation as long as they are registered in a reception centre.[3] In 2015, the capacity of the reception system was stretched with the arrival of more than 32 000 asylum seekers; a drastic increase from the previous years.[4] Processing times of applications in the immigration service grew longer, and many cases were hastily processed resulting in an increase in complaints and further applications. Where the state authorities struggled to provide assistance to the newcomers, both old and new humanitarian organisations and grassroots projects stepped in to assist in various tasks from donating clothes to finding temporary accommodation as an alternative to unconformable reception centres. A voluntary-based initiative for organising private accommodation, called the Home Accommodation Network, was formed towards the end of the summer in 2015 by local activists and volunteers together with asylum seekers. Since then, many locals have shared their homes with asylum seekers during the long application process, making it possible to live in a home for free instead of a reception centre. Hundreds of these accommodations have been mediated through the network, and many others through personal networks and other channels.

Contentious solidarity mobilisations in the asylum 'crisis'

Home accommodation of asylum seekers is a particular form of pro-asylum solidarity mobilisation as it takes place in and makes use of the home of the people involved. Various forms of protests, citizenship struggles and solidarity movements taken up by migrants and

locals have been studied in critical migration and social movement scholarships over the past decade and since the so-called asylum crisis (e.g. Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Della Porta 2018; Fontanari and Ambrosini 2018). The mobilisations have been discussed for example from the point of view of the spatial aspects of solidarity and political claims-making (e.g. Çağlar 2016; Steinhilper 2018). Recent studies have introduced alternative spaces where these actions take place, including squats instead of institutional housing (Dadusc, Grazioli, and Martínez 2019) and camps, borders, and urban encounters where solidarities emerge (Maestri and Hughes 2017, 626). Some forms of mobilisations and struggles, such as occupations and demonstrations, take place in public space. However, many of these efforts are situated in less visible, more mundane spaces and situations, 'in the micro-political spectrum of everyday life and the private sphere' (Ataç et al. 2015, 6). The emphasis on public spaces is understandable because social movements and protests typically aim at influencing decision makers and society (Rosenberger, Stern, and Merhaut 2018), often by drawing attention with visibility in the public space (e.g. Näre 2018). However, home can also be a space of encounter in which networks and relationships between citizens and non-citizens are formed. As the phenomenon studied here is, on the one hand, part of a transnational movement, and on the other, connected to the space of home, this article aims to fill this gap.

Contentious hospitality

The vast literature on hospitality has discussed the relationship between hospitality, power, and migration, arguing that hospitality necessarily involves unequal, yet dynamic and contested, power relations between guest and host (e.g. Bulley 2017; Derrida 2005; Tataryn 2013). Bulley (2016) claims that hospitality is intrinsically a spatial process – not just because it always takes place somewhere but also because it produces and transforms spaces and boundaries. Following Derrida's (1999) thinking, he argues that hospitality *is* ethics, it is how we practice relations with difference and construct 'us' (Bulley 2017, 3–4). Ethics does not, however, mean absence of hostility, violence, and resistance that are also constitutive of hospitality (Bulley 2017, 3). Hospitality is typically understood as dynamic site of power struggles and resistance between guest and host, both in micro-level relations and at the national level. Acts of hospitality are less often discussed in relation to political agency or grassroots resistance (cf. Bendixsen and Wyller 2019). The term I suggest, *contentious hospitality*, places political contention, home, and hospitality into same discussion. It is an attempt to theoretically bridge empirical discussions on pro-asylum mobilisations in critical migration studies with the concepts of hospitality and home. While theorisation on *acts of citizenship* (Isin and Nielsen 2008) is influential when researching the wider pro-asylum movement, which home accommodation is part of, its greatest analytical contribution lies in non-citizen claims-making and it is most often used in that empirical context. Although one of the principles of home accommodation activity is recognising migrants' agency and acting together rather than *for* asylum seekers (cf. Merikoski 2019), this paper focuses on the hosts' perspective of the phenomenon. Thus, the analytical concept *contentious hospitality* highlights that this study is about the hosts' acts of hospitality as political agency.

I understand hospitality in home accommodation to be a contentious act, not merely one of solidarity. The analysis of the hosts' motivations and intentions reveals that

hospitality is explicitly or implicitly used by the hosts to challenge degradations to the right to asylum. By showing a hospitable example they seek to reduce negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and undermine societal polarisation around the contentious question of asylum. Hosts are using their homes and their power as citizens to take part in the debate over who is welcome. Inspired by both contentious politics literature and critical migration studies, Della Porta (2018) writes about *contentious moves* when referring to both the movements of migrants and the solidarity mobilisations that emerged as a response to the asylum 'crisis'. According to her, these acts are contentious because the very movement of migrants is resistance to the constraints of borders and considered as acts of citizenship; therefore, acts of solidarity with migrants also challenge citizenship regimes (Della Porta 2018, 5). Furthermore, recent cases of people being tried in Europe for assisting migrants in irregular situations, for so-called crimes of solidarity, highlight how political and contentious these acts are (Tazzioli and Walters 2019). Following this line of thought, I argue that hospitality offered to asylum seekers is a grassroots counter-action to restrictions to migration and right to asylum, as well as a challenge to the discourse that depicts asylum seekers as a threat. This is demonstrated in the ways in which the hosts describe their motivations and their politicisation as a result of home accommodation.

Accommodating asylum seekers in private homes can be seen as contentious also because it disrupts the common practice and understanding of how migrants seeking asylum ought to be institutionally housed (cf. Brun and Fábos 2015). Dadusc, Grazioli, and Martínez (2019, 528) understand migrants' self-organised squats as sites of solidarity, care and social relations beyond bordering and citizenship regimes. Struggles emerging in these places disrupt host–guest relations that perpetuate state-imposed hierarchies in humanitarian practices (Dadusc, Grazioli, and Martínez 2019, 521). Although it can be argued that self-organised squats constitute a different level of resistance to the humanitarian reception system and state control than the Finnish case of home accommodation does – since the latter is for the most part practised with the authorities' acceptance – I see analytical affinities here. Enabling asylum seekers to move from reception centres into the local community and inside local homes can be perceived as resistance to humanitarian bordering and the immobility forced on asylum seekers by reception practices (cf. Dadusc, Grazioli, and Martínez 2019). Home accommodation provides a better potentiality to lead a normal everyday life, disrupting the idea of how asylum seekers should be housed – or controlled – while their claim for asylum is being evaluated.

The political space of home

While various alternative spaces have recently been discussed as important sites for pro-asylum movement and political claims-making, the private home remains little discussed in relation to these. This article follows a feminist citizenship theorisation that seeks to connect the intimate and domestic with the political and global (cf. Lister 2007). Feminist scholarship has portrayed home as a complex, emotional and politicised space (e.g. Blunt and Downing 2006) and highlighted the interrelatedness of the so-called public and private spheres or questioned their separation to begin with (Pateman 1989). Feminist citizenship theory has also challenged the public–private dichotomy that used to underpin the association of citizenship with the public sphere (Lister 2007). Studies on au pairs

and migrant live-in workers have discussed home as a site where intersectional power dynamics and post-colonial labour relations take place (e.g. Anderson 2000; Cox and Narula 2003; Näre 2011). The literature on migrant homemaking has emphasised the political meaning of homes, and home as a space of belonging and inclusion and also exclusion (e.g. Ahmed et al. 2003; Boccagni 2017). Furthermore, home is not always a place of warmth and care, but it can also be a site of oppression and violence, as well as a site of physical and emotional labour (Blunt and Downing 2006; Delphy 2016). Instead of a static understanding of home, I follow Massey's (1994) thinking that a home is constructed in relation to other places, and it is constantly being reproduced. Massey (1994, 169) argues that the identity of a place called home is always open for contestation. How home is used can challenge the common discursive separation of public and private as separate spheres. I argue that, by offering hospitality, hosts are taking part in wider societal debates around migration, rights and belonging, and that the case of home accommodation further consolidates the understanding of private and public as interlinked rather than separate spheres in society.

Data and methods

This article is based on in-depth interviews I conducted with 30 hosts between 2017 and 2019. I contacted potential participants through my personal networks, in a Facebook group and subsequently by snowballing. The interviewed hosts were aged 30–70 years (women, $n = 21$; men, $n = 9$). Most of the participants lived with a partner, children or both; others lived in a single household or communally. Some of them had a migration background, but the majority identified as Finnish. Several participants identified as activists and took part in pro-asylum mobilisations, and commonly they had met the asylum seeker who lived with them through these activities. However, most of them had no such background, and in these cases, the accommodation was typically mediated through the network or a friend involved in organising accommodations.

I conducted the interviews in the participants' homes, with few exceptions. In most cases the asylum seeker had already moved out by the time of the interview. The accommodations had lasted from a couple of months to more than two years. Some hosts had lived with several asylum seekers at the same time or sequentially. In the most typical situation, the host(s) shared their home with one asylum seeker until she or he received a residence permit based on asylum or employment, or until the asylum claim failed and that person had to leave Finland. Some accommodations ended for other reasons, such as move to another region, or minor frictions due to differences in housekeeping habits or expectations. In few cases, the cohabitation continued after the asylum seeker's situation was irregularised after receiving a negative decision, or after she or he obtained a residence status and stayed as a roommate or (sub)tenant.

As the primary interest in this research is the local hosts' motivations for hospitality and their experience about sharing their home, asylum seekers were not interviewed. There are several ethical dilemmas involved when researching people in precarious situations. As summarised by Clark-Kazak (2017) asylum seekers are asked to tell and retell their stories to several people throughout the process, and researchers' questions may add to the harm of recalling painful experiences. Although many people do wish to tell their stories, it is still worth being critical about the idea of 'giving voice' and

assuming that participating in a study would have benefits for the participants (cf. Doná 2007). Thus, one has to consider critically if interviewing certain people is necessary for the purposes of the study. Furthermore, having no access to interpretation I would have had to limit my participants to the ones with whom I share a language. The decision to focus on the hosts' stories results into having only their voices in my data, which I have been conscious and explicit about throughout the analysis.

The interviews were semi-structured and their duration ranged from one to 2.5 hours. I used questions to guide the conversation, also permitting space for new topics emerging in the discussion. The interviews were transcribed, anonymised, thematically coded, and further carefully analysed in relation to the key theoretical discussions. In this article, the aim was to understand what inspired the hosts to offer hospitality and to consider if home accommodation can be understood as a form of political agency and resistance. I also examined different meanings for home emerging in these discussions, and if sharing home transforms the hosts' actions.

Throughout the research process, I paid great attention to preserving anonymity and to good ethical principles, given the societal and emotional sensitivity of the topic.[5] Although the participants were not personally in a precarious societal position, their involvement with pro-asylum movement make them vulnerable to harassment as well, and they shared sensitive details about the asylum seekers' situation with me. All participants and other people mentioned during the interviews were given pseudonyms, and some information in the excerpts may have been altered to ensure anonymity, such as references to places or events that could be recognisable.

Contentious hospitality in home accommodation of asylum seekers

The argument that home accommodation is a form of contentious hospitality is threefold. First, home accommodation often results from a will to take part in societal debates, contest restrictions to the right to asylum, and make a statement of solidarity. Although not all participants initially engaged in it to practice resistance, the physical and emotional proximity often led to politicisation of the hosts' actions and motives. Second, home accommodation can be seen as resistance to the state authorities' logic of housing asylum seekers in reception centres, and thus isolated from the local community. Furthermore, home accommodation provides valuable social and spatial resources in the struggle for asylum. Third, following feminist theorisation of home and citizenship, I argue that home accommodation further consolidates the understanding of home as a space where political agency takes place. Moreover, it counters the binary understanding of hospitality merely as a two-way power struggle between guest and host.

The mobilising effect of the 'crisis'

Grassroots networks and pro-asylum activists have provided assistance and emergency accommodation for irregularised migrants in private homes also before 2015. However, the recent surge of civic hospitality towards asylum seekers has been unprecedented. As others have noted (e.g. Gill 2018; Karakayali 2018), a special feature of the 'crisis' of 2015 is that it mobilised people with no activist background to join the efforts. In Finland, many locals understood for the first time that Finland was not going to guarantee safety

for everyone in need, and that asylum seekers were often treated with suspicion and contempt by the authorities. Many citizens found this unjust and against the image of Finland they held. It has been argued that being morally shocked can be a transformative moment that mobilises people to make claims to authorities (Kleres 2018; Rosenberger, Stern, and Merhaut 2018). My analysis supports these findings in suggesting that the discourse of crisis motivated people to open their homes. Media coverage brought the asylum seekers' situation closer to people who were not personally afflicted by it. For one respondent, Maria, the initial push came from reading about failed asylum seekers' situation in the news:

> I saw in the newspapers – at the beginning of 2017 – that refugees here were living outside. Sometimes they no longer had access to camp because they had received negative asylum decisions. It was minus 12 or 13 and very windy, it was just not understandable that people were living outside. [. . .] So, I joined the demonstration and visited asylum seekers there. Once, I read an article about a man who had received two negatives and was living outside. I decided I would find him and ask if he wanted to come live with me.

Rosenberger and Winkler (2014) argue that reactive emotions, such as anger or disbelief, can transfer into morally loaded emotions and then into action. Maria's example shows how media imageries evoke emotions. In her case, it started out as what could be called a personified reaction (cf. Probst and Bader 2018), helping a particular person in need, which then transformed into deeper engagement with the movement and wider consciousness regarding asylum questions. By the time of the interview, she had lived with two asylum seekers and was involved with pro-asylum movement. In her research on volunteers at the 'Jungle' camp at Calais, Sandri (2018) found that many volunteers who initially framed themselves humanitarians with no political attachments, later turned towards activism. Similarly many hosts described their initial reason as responding to the immediate needs of migrants, but soon it became impossible to ignore the political context behind those needs.

Many hosts who had not previously engaged with political activism found the actions of Finnish authorities and the hosting experience eye-opening. Anita narrated her route from first volunteering in a local reception centre, and then becoming a host and an activist. She told me that, initially, the push to act came from a learned understanding of empathy and humanity: 'My mother taught me that when someone knocks on your door, you open it'. She continued:

> At first it was like . . . I just felt I had to go there [the reception centre] and do something. It was mostly an ethical choice. But this quickly changed when I saw what the government is doing, and also Red Cross and official organisations – and what my so-called country is doing. It changed to, 'F–k, I'm not gonna be part of that'!

It is tangible in her description how her initial response turned into a more politicised anger and growing political consciousness, which resulted in her wanting to resist the injustices she witnessed. In several cases, seeing someone go through the complicated and often hopeless asylum process under the same roof resulted in a loss of trust in the Finnish legal system, government, immigration service, and police, which further politicised the hosts' sentiments and actions. Most participants had never personally had to question the fairness of the Finnish justice system before, and now many expressed that their trust had been eroded to the extent that the country no longer felt the same. This is

surprising in Finland, where levels of trust in the justice system, and especially in the police, have typically been among the highest in Europe (Jackson et al. 2011). Although the fields of reception and immigration control include various actors from all sectors, the loss of trust resulted in the hosts' perception of the whole country shifting from safe and familiar to hostile and unforeseen. In the following quotation, Kristiina describes this erosion of trust after a year of living with two asylum seekers, who both had negative decisions on their applications and were afraid of being deported:

> I went to meet my member of parliament and said that it is crazy that people are being sent back! I wouldn't have believed that this was possible in Finland; I thought Finland was a state governed by law. But my trust has crumbled over the last year. [. . .] It is sad, I had always thought that even if we have different opinions we have a multiple-party system and we find solutions through discussion. But Finland is not like that anymore. This has changed radically, and that's why many people say that this is not 'my' Finland anymore. *My* Finland is not like this.

The way Kristiina describes her eroding sense of trust, and through it, her changing relationship to Finnish society and state, is typical of pro-asylum mobilisations, revealing the experienced divide between citizens and their states (cf. Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti 2011). There is an altruistic dimension to pro-asylum mobilisations because protesters are not often personally affected by the issue they address (Rosenberger, Stern, and Merhaut 2018). I argue that, while expressing support for the claims of others, the hosts are also pursuing something personal. Besides looking for multicultural experiences or friendships, many hosts are opening their homes to renegotiate their own sense of belonging. While making demands towards the state, they are not just seeking rights for others but also trying to bring back the country they feel has changed. This discourse also relates to the understanding of hospitality as ethics; as a way of negotiating relations with difference and 'us' (Bulley 2017; Derrida 1999). As Malkki (2015) argues in reference to humanitarian volunteers, the neediness involved in volunteering practices is more complex than the assumed one-way assistance towards the ones with less power. My informants were quite unanimous in rejecting the idea of one-way assistance, and some even refused to call it helping, since helping suggests an imbalance of power they wanted to eschew (Merikoski 2019). However, in a way, home accommodation highlights the supremacy of citizenship over other statuses: hosts have material, social, and political privileges that enable hospitality. Many hosts acknowledged this and for them accommodating was a conscious attempt to put the power they had into use in favour of asylum seekers' claims.

Most participants expressed that strong ties developed between them and the asylum seekers when sharing home and everyday life. Although some hosts preferred framing the relationship as friendship between equals, most described their relationship with the asylum seeker to be like family. While some had more or less deliberately maintained a level of distance, many others felt they were personally affected by the relationship and the asylum seeker's difficult situation. These ties between people enfold the most important politicising power that home accommodation has – the spatial and often emotional closeness that makes people's needs indistinguishable over time. Proximity to the issue of asylum through the other person further encourages acts of resistance. 'They would have to handcuff me and carry me out first', was how one host expressed how he would react if

police showed up at their door with the intention of detaining the asylum seeker residing there, and many others made similar comments.

A contentious alternative to state-run housing

The practical arrangements of how an asylum seeker ends up living in a local home varies, and not all accommodation activity is organised through Home Accommodation Network. Often, both short- and long-term accommodations are found through the asylum seekers' personal networks. However, the network has been an important agent in rendering home accommodation a viable alternative to reception centres for many asylum seekers and spreading knowledge about it to potential hosts. Upon planning the network, its founders were in contact with Finnish immigration services to ensure the authorities would comply with the practice so that home accommodation would not lead to a loss of reception services or any other difficulties for asylum seekers. One could argue that cooperation with authorities undermines the contentious nature of home accommodation. Moreover, several interviewed hosts emphasised how they think hospitality and solidarity should be something ordinary and humane instead of marginal, and many of them explicitly depoliticised their hospitality (cf. Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017). Regardless of how apolitical the initial motivations of an individual host may be, I maintain that the practical matters of home and housing of asylum seekers are always political and contentious questions. This is also reflected in the political debates over asylum policies and media narratives of chaos and uncontrollability that dominated the public discourse during the 'crisis' (Seppälä et al. 2020).

The dominant logic of the reception system is housing asylum seekers in centres located in remote areas, with relatively little contact with the surrounding society, and often with poor public transport connections (Näre 2018). Studies have shown that time spent in reception centre is often marked with waiting, idleness, frustration, and isolation from the rest of the community (Seppälä et al. 2020). Thus, home accommodation can enable relationships with locals and other migrants by facilitating access to urban spaces of encounter. By living among local people in residential areas connected with public transport, asylum seekers gain access to public spaces and urban centres, events of different networks, and employment opportunities. These connections, both human and spatial, create possibilities for migrants' self-organisation and claims making, as well as homemaking and belonging. Networks and ties to local activists and volunteers are perceived as the most valuable resource for migrants' struggles, which typically lack material resources or political support (Rosenberger, Stern, and Merhaut 2018; Steinhilper 2018). Moreover, the support asylum seekers receive from their hosts is often highly valuable in practice. Many hosts use their time, money, connections, and societal know-how when trying to make sure the asylum case is well processed, deportation avoided or a job – and with it, an employment-based residence – obtained. I see enabling all this as contentious in the current political climate.

Both Home Accommodation Network and Finnish Immigration Service have drawn some guidelines for local people who wish to accommodate an asylum seeker. The one drafted by the network's members gives a positive but realistic picture and it encourages people to take part (Kotimajoitusverkosto 2019). In contrast, in the guidelines on the immigration service's website, the choice of words and type of information given leave

the impression that home accommodation is not viewed as an ideal housing arrangement. The text starts with a rather negative formulation, saying that the 'law does not prohibit the accommodation of immigrants' (Migri 2015). The rest of the short text mainly lists factors that one should consider that may cause problems or discomfort, such as cultural differences. The overall impression is that accommodating is not exactly encouraged, although not prohibited or explicitly discouraged. At the end of the text, there is a recommendation to instead volunteer with the Red Cross, 'if accommodating feels too great a commitment' (Migri 2015). A host and member of Home Accommodation Network, Anne, had been regularly in contact with Finnish immigration services regarding the practicalities of home accommodation. She told me the following:

> They [immigration authorities] think everyone should be in the reception centre so it would be manageable and safer. The safety perspective is really strong. They ask questions like, 'Who is responsible if the host abuses the asylum seeker, or if the asylum seeker kills the host?'. Ehhh … […] Instead, home accommodation often reveals cases of abuse. I just heard about an asylum seeker who was taken advantage of by his employer, and his host is trying to help him. But people living in reception centres rarely tell anyone about such things. I'm sure that home accommodation increases understanding at all levels and enhances trust between groups of people. So [it annoys me] to think they just talk about the dangers.

Like many others, Anne found it surprising that the immigration authorities or reception service providers sometimes saw home accommodation as negatively as they did, given its obvious benefits for integration and wellbeing. Some participants, who were activists regularly helping asylum seekers with their cases, even expressed a feeling that the authorities are deliberately trying to stop strong ties between asylum seekers and local people from developing to keep asylum seekers from having local networks, making them more deportable. This is clearly a matter of interpretation. However, it shows how little volunteers, activists, and hosts supporting asylum seekers trust the immigration service and state-led reception services to take care of the needs of people seeking asylum in Finland.

Home as a site of political and societal agency

Home accommodation practice connects the private home to societal debates and mobilisations around questions of asylum and belonging. Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti (2011) claim that increased use of deportation by states and protests opposing them highlight how divided nations are in the face of migration, and this accentuates the struggle between people and the state over who has the power to define who belongs to the nation. Individual citizens may have relatively little power in these questions, but they have power in their homes, and that is significant. To have a home and sovereignty over it is a condition of hospitality (Derrida 2005). Some of the interviewed hosts reflected on the power they held as citizens and the power that stems from having a home. One of the participants, Emma, who was also one of the founding members of the network, reflected on the meaning of home as a source of power and agency as follows:

> So, this is how it started – the idea that the home is like a societal agent, or a form of civic agency. The power a single citizen holds is relatively limited, but home is quite a strong space of agency. No matter how small your home is, you still have something not everyone has, and through that, you can act politically.

Although the question of who should be included in the nation and the 'national home' is a matter of political debate and discourse at the national level (e.g. Lonergan 2018; Walters 2004), a single citizen may exercise power in her home and choose differently. Like Emma, many hosts viewed home accommodation as a powerful form of civic agency and resistance. This highlights the importance of home-space in societal and political agency, as well as how intertwined the public and private spheres are (Lister 2007; Pateman 1989). Moreover, several hosts explicitly framed hospitality as a way to affect the society's opinions about refugees.

The growing societal tensions around questions of migration and asylum motivated many locals to open their doors. Several hosts mentioned societal polarisation, intolerance towards migrant-others and the rise of populist-right to mainstream politics as their main motivators. When asked if these developments had encouraged his family to offer hospitality, one respondent, Peter, gave the following answer:

> Absolutely. Back then, when thousands of asylum seekers came and this societal polarisation became visible, we felt we had to do something to fix it. Both through our example and through our contribution. [. . .] I felt that [the asylum discussion] is something we need to tackle. The good thing is that it has made the deeply rooted racism in Finnish society visible. [. . .] I'm worried if our society has developed such that we normalise and justify that, and I think that is something we need to actively resist.

His statement resonates with a view that decisions made in private are important and influential. Not only can one help an individual in search of safety, but also, opening one's home can be a way to actively resist negative developments in society. This supports my argument about hospitality not being merely a charitable act of solidarity; it can be an attempt to contest and counteract. Although hosts are not able to choose who is invited inside the 'national home', they can decide to open the door to theirs, and that is seen as a powerful statement. Anita put it as follows:

> When I saw the Close the Borders group demonstrating and waving Finnish flags, I thought: Okay, if asylum seekers aren't welcome in this country, then at least they are welcome in my home! I can't do anything about it if our government is shitty, but at least in this country you can still open the door to your own home. [. . .] I will carry out this resistance now, I won't participate in what government and the general society is doing. I want to show . . . I want to think that I made the right decisions.

Home is a metaphor often used in the discourse of protecting the national home from the outside threats migrants supposedly pose (Walters 2004). Anita uses the symbolic parallel between the home and the country while arguing the opposite: by opening her home, she makes a point about welcoming asylum seekers to Finland. Her description illustrates how citizens can use the power over one's home as a method of political and symbolic resistance and how hospitality can be an act against the restrictions to migration. However, hospitality necessarily involves some exclusivity and boundaries: it is extended to some individuals but not all (Tataryn 2013, 185). This leads to the question of what types of exclusions the hosts are maintaining and who the wanted migrants are in their opinion. While this question is beyond the scope of this article, it requires further examination.

Conclusions

In Finland, accommodating asylum seekers in local homes is one of the contentious grassroots mobilisations that emerged in the aftermath of the 'summer of migration'. Emotions like anger and disbelief are known to mobilise people to act in solidarity with asylum seekers (Kleres 2018), and these feelings emerged strongly in the analysis of how the participants framed their motivations for hospitality. The mediatised crisis discourse and imagery caused an urge to help, and negative societal developments – such as degradations to the right to asylum – inspired many hosts to resist those developments by using their homes to make a statement. This reveals the multiple dimensions of this act of hospitality; by opening the doors to one's home, a host exercises power not only inside the domestic space in relation to the guest but also in relation to the wider society and state institutions. This could also be understood as an attempt to redefine citizenship values (e.g. Danewid 2017), which would be an interesting topic for further consideration. By inviting asylum seekers to their homes, the hosts made a statement against the current migration policies and discourse, which they found unjust. Thus, hospitality reveals the private home as one of the spaces where restrictions to migration are being contested and the right to asylum claimed. I have suggested the term *contentious hospitality* where resistance is part of hospitality. I have argued that by opening their homes to asylum seekers citizens take part in a wider societal debate over who is welcome. On the one hand, they contest calls for border-closure and unjust decisions made by authorities; on the other, they exercise power as citizens in choosing who they support and under which terms.

The dominant logic of humanitarian reception practices involves arranging housing for asylum seekers in reception centres, which are often isolated from the surrounding community, and not in private homes, regardless of the benefits that home accommodation may provide. Offering a home can facilitate asylum seekers' participation in the wider society, both symbolically and practically. The data shows that sharing the home and everyday life often leads to close ties between locals and newcomers. Moreover, witnessing the asylum process and the multiple hardships it often entails is a politicising experience for many hosts. Thus, the private home is a powerful site of solidarity and resistance. Ultimately, I argue that understanding the political importance of home in solidarity mobilisations can broaden our understanding of citizenship and the spaces in which it is performed and negotiated.

Notes

1. I avoid the term 'refugee crisis' since the phrase is problematic, although commonly used. Instead, I talk about political crisis or asylum 'crisis', which locates the crisis in the EU and state-level politics (see Karakayali 2018).
2. Contentious politics refers to forms of collective political struggles, such as protests, social movements and rebellions (Tilly 2000, 137).
3. Finnish reception centres are run by municipalities, immigration service, NGOs, or companies, and they all offer same reception services.
4. In 2015, there were 32 477 new asylum applications in Finland, which was approximately ten times more than in the previous year (Migri 2019).
5. For ethical guidelines, the Finnish National Board of Research Integrity's guidelines were consulted.

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